

## **VII : GOALS AND PRIORITIES FOR SUBURBANIZATION AND RELATED PROPERTY TYPES**

There are three stages in the historic preservation planning process in Delaware: 1) establishing a planning framework by developing an historic context and identifying property types; 2) identifying the historic resource base through the identification, evaluation, and registration of resources which culminates in a list of registered properties and 3) establishing preservation goals for treatment of the resources and integration in other plans. The previous chapters have completed the first stage, the planning framework, by developing the suburbanization historic context and its associated property types, determining criteria for the evaluation of each of the property types.

This chapter sets goals and recommends methods for completing the identification, evaluation, and registration of the historic resources related to suburbanization in the Wilmington vicinity. The purpose of these identification activities is to identify the number of resources related to the suburbanization historic context, as defined by property types, and to gather information needed to determine which resources might be eligible for consideration for the National Register under the criteria established in Chapter VI. Evaluation activities are intended to determine which resources actually meet the criteria and are eligible for nomination to the National Register.

### **Priorities and Goals for Identification and Evaluation Activities**

Priorities for identification and evaluation activities are based on three of the associative property types, each with its own chronological period:

1. Streetcar Subdivisions: 1880-1920+/-
2. Turnpike Subdivisions: 1920-1940+/-
3. Automobile Subdivisions: 1940-1950+

The property types defined by the subtheme of Transportation provide a useful tool for organizing consideration of subdivision development. Each form of transportation is linked to a roughly-defined time period so associating a particular subdivision with a particular type of transportation identifies the subdivision with a chronological period. Each transportation form is also associated with a particular geographic configuration, trolleys following one unique pattern, turnpikes a second, and automobiles a third. Connecting a subdivision with a transportation form allows one to predict where the subdivision should lie geographically and also suggests certain design elements that are likely to occur with such a connection. While the historic context identifies many other property types, all subdivisions must relate to one of these three; therefore, organizing identification activities around them will assure that all subdivisions are identified.

The oldest subdivisions--the Streetcar Subdivisions, 1880 to 1920+/- have the highest priority for identification and evaluation. They are the subdivisions closest to Wilmington and many are

threatened by physical deterioration of the housing stock and loss of integrity in the actual subdivision.

### **Methodology for Identification and Evaluation**

Because they are the basic property type of the suburbanization historic context, subdivisions (and not buildings) will be the primary historic resources surveyed in the identification and evaluation activities. Since, to be eligible for the National Register, a building, except under special circumstances, must be a part of an eligible subdivision, dwellings will be surveyed as a element in a subdivision, as an element of this historic landscape. Two new cultural resource survey forms should be designed, one for suburban dwellings and one for subdivisions, and substituted for the building form normally used for reconnaissance surveys. The survey forms will collect information about the attributes for the subdivisions as a whole. Buildings will be surveyed on the form in terms of their dwelling property types and their attributes related to the design of the subdivision, such as orientation on the building lot.

Not only is this approach dictated by the logic of the property types associated with suburbanization but by the logistics and cost of the survey. As indicated in Chapter I, the number of dwellings and other resources associated with the suburbanization context is huge. It would be far beyond the present personnel and financial resources of the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office and the New Castle County Preservation Planning Office to undertake such a survey. Even if funds were available, it would be prohibitively time consuming. From a methodological point of view, surveying subdivisions and conducting intensive survey of buildings within potentially eligible subdivisions establishes a method of sampling dwellings, as allowed under the Secretary's Standards for Identification.

The methods used to carry out the priorities for identification and evaluation activities include archival research and two levels of field survey: reconnaissance and intensive. A reconnaissance survey identifies all resources within a designated geographic area or property type and collects information sufficient to determine whether a resource is potentially eligible for the National Register. An intensive survey evaluates the data from the reconnaissance survey, determines which resources are potentially eligible and then resurveys those properties, collecting information detailed enough to make a final determination of eligibility. The product of the evaluation phase is a list of all resources that are eligible for the National Register under National Register criteria as well as the criteria established in the historic context.

An additional goal for identification and evaluation activities is the development of another historic context to deal with the development of social and economic support systems for the suburbs--i.e, schools, churches, shopping centers, gas stations, commercial areas, etc.

### **Work Program for Identification and Evaluation Activities**

The following work program for the completion of the identification and evaluation activities is organized around the three major property types. The work elements for one property type should be completed before moving on to the next one. The goal of the work program is to assure that all of the

potentially eligible subdivisions will be surveyed within the appropriate property types. It is expected that the identification and evaluation activities for one property type could take place in one year. The tasks for completion of the work element associated with each property type are:

**Reconnaissance Survey.** The reconnaissance survey should collect data appropriate to determining those subdivisions that are potentially eligible for nomination to the National Register (Level 1), those subdivisions that are not eligible but may provide important information (Level 2), or those subdivisions that are not eligible for the National Register based on established criteria (Level 3). There are three activities necessary to complete the reconnaissance survey: archival research, field survey, and creation of a computer database. These activities should be carried out in accordance with the documentation requirements in Appendix E.

**A. Archival research** is carried out for two purposes. The first is to identify subdivisions related to a particular property type. Using maps and other secondary sources, including this historic context, all subdivisions platted or initiated during the time period of the property type should be identified. Second, core data must be collected as called for on the Subdivision Survey Form. At the level of the subdivision data collected will include size in acres, number of parcels, size of parcels, street patterns classification, etc.; for dwellings, data should include the number of buildings, floor area, etc.

**B. Field survey** should be conducted for all subdivisions identified with the property type, using the Subdivision Survey Form to confirm map information, and subdivision and building attributes. Photographs should be taken as required in Appendix E.

**C. A computer database** should be created from the data collected during archival research and field work.

**Intensive Survey.** The intensive survey should review the reconnaissance survey data to determine which resources are eligible for nomination to the National Register, either in a district or a multiple property nomination. For the intensive survey, a more detailed survey form and check will be used to assure that all relevant aspects of the developments are examined.

**A. An evaluation of the reconnaissance survey** should be carried out to determine which subdivisions related to the property type are potentially eligible for nomination to the National Register (Level 1), those that are ineligible but may provide important information (Level 2), or are completely ineligible for nomination (Level 3). Level 2 subdivisions may include dwellings that are eligible for nomination under a multiple property submission. All subdivisions evaluated as Level 1 or Level 2 should be ranked from highest integrity to lowest.

**B. Select Level 1 subdivisions for intensive field survey** based on realistic assessments of the constraints of staffing, time, and funding. A sufficient number should be surveyed to allow reliable assessment of survey data.

**C. Archival research** should be conducted for each of the subdivisions selected for intensive field study. This research should determine the development sequence of the subdivision, the presence or absence of restrictive covenants, the method of financing, and other information relevant to the associative property types.

**D. Intensive field survey of subdivisions** should be conducted using Intensive Subdivision Survey Form and Checklist.

**E. A survey of dwellings** in the selected subdivisions should be carried out, using the Subdivision Dwelling Survey Form, a modified version of the state cultural resource survey form.

**F. Evaluate subdivisions against established criteria to determine which resources are eligible for nomination to the National Register.** Once eligibility has been established, recommendations should be made as to which subdivisions represent the best examples of the particular property type and should be nominated to the next element of the work program.

**G. Identification and evaluation of dwellings in Level 2 subdivisions** that are potentially eligible for nomination through multiple property nominations should be carried out. These dwellings should be surveyed and evaluated for their relationship to the themes established in the historic context as well as being evaluated in terms of their integrity.

#### **Time Schedule for Identification and Evaluation Activities**

The priorities and time schedule for completion of the identification and evaluation activities related to the suburbanization historic context are as follows:

| PROPERTY TYPE                           | RECONNAISSANCE<br>& INTENSIVE SURVEY |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| STREETCAR SUBDIVISIONS<br>1880-1920+/-  | 1993-1994                            |
| TURNPIKE SUBDIVISIONS<br>1920-1940+/-   | 1995-1996                            |
| AUTOMOBILE SUBDIVISIONS<br>1940-1950+/- | 1997-1998                            |

On this schedule, with those suburbs built after 1950 becoming eligible for the National Register in 2000, the survey and evaluation of properties will be current.

#### **Priorities and Goals for Registration Activities**

The primary goal for registration activities is that a minimum of two eligible subdivisions for each of

the three major property types be nominated to the National Register within two years of the completion of the identification and evaluation activities for that property type. The nominated subdivisions should be selected for their representation of the variety of subthemes related to the historic context of suburbanization.

The Historic Context for Suburbanization identifies both subdivisions and suburban dwellings as key elements, expressing different yet related aspects of the process of suburbanization. In some cases, dwellings will occur in subdivisions that lack the integrity necessary to be considered eligible for the National Register. The dwellings themselves, however, may retain substantial integrity and should be considered for inclusion in a multiple property nomination based on the dwellings' particular building style. The thematic context for the nomination would still be suburbanization because, first, the dwellings are found in identifiable, though ineligible, subdivisions and, second, the dwelling styles articulate key aspects of the suburbanization process. As such dwellings are identified in dispersed subdivisions, they should be considered for nomination as part of a multiple property nomination developed to address architectural themes that are not adequately represented by the historic district subdivisions nominations.

| PROPERTY TYPE                           | NATIONAL REGISTER<br>NOMINATIONS |
|---|----------------------------------|
| STREETCAR SUBDIVISIONS<br>1880-1920+/-  | 1994-1996                        |
| TURNPIKE SUBDIVISIONS<br>1920-1940+/-   | 1996-1998                        |
| AUTOMOBILE SUBDIVISIONS<br>1940-1950+/- | 1998-2000                        |

#### **Priorities and Goals for Treatment Activities**

Treatment refers to the specific actions that can be taken to preserve an historic property or landscape. The primary historic property to be preserved from the suburbanization historic context is the subdivision, consisting of its site, its internal improvements for vehicular and pedestrian circulation, public open space and community facilities, if present, and the pattern of subdivision of lots and the houses built on them. The secondary historic property to be preserved are suburban dwellings on their lots. The major means of preserving historic subdivisions will be through public education and by maintaining subdivisions and their buildings in continued use through preservation activities and by reinforcing the integrity of subdivisions in conjunction with the New Castle County Comprehensive Plan.

Since there is little appreciation among the public that suburban subdivisions have historic character, or most any twentieth century property for that matter, and can now be listed on the National

Register of Historic Places, it is recommended that the public education program be initiated along with the identification and evaluation activities to educate them about the historical significance of suburbs and promoting their cooperation with field surveys. Later, as the identification and evaluation activities are completed for each of the major property types--Streetcar Subdivisions, Turnpike Subdivisions, and Automobile Subdivisions--more intensive treatment activities would be undertaken after they have been evaluated and a list compiled of those subdivisions eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The priorities for treatment are that the oldest suburbs, those built from 1880 to about 1920, the Streetcar Subdivisions, would have the highest priority followed by the Turnpike Subdivisions developed from 1920 to 1940 and then by the Automobile Subdivisions constructed after 1940.

It should be noted that New Castle County has a very weak historic preservation ordinance. Historic districts can only be established if all of the owners of property in an area petition for a rezoning of their areas as an historic district. The County has no power to create an historic district without such consent; nor can individual properties be designated for protection without the owner's permission. The only traditional means for preserving historically significant properties available in New Castle County is through documentation, recognition through listing on the National Register of Historic Places and public education.

Because subdivisions are a new type of historic property--they are all landscapes, very numerous, and perhaps the first mass-produced historic property--they call for treatment strategies which mix new and old approaches. As historic landscapes, significant subdivisions could be preserved as historic districts, a tested approach. However, because there are so many similar subdivisions, only a few could be so preserved practically. With only one full-time historic preservation planner and a minimal budget, designating and administering a number of large historic districts would take important time and resources away from other more important tasks, such as completing identification, evaluation and registration activities for a variety of historic resources in addition to those associated with the Suburbanization Historic Context. As well, until subdivisions are well established in the public mind as important, and legitimate, historic resources, an aggressive effort to create formal suburban historic districts might meet with skepticism, if not opposition.

There is, however, a good potential for preserving residential subdivisions without using traditional preservation treatments. Most subdivisions are in continued use and, in their general character, protected by zoning. The need for preservation treatment arises when the integrity of historic resources are threatened from sources ranging from the deterioration of the property itself to changes in its land use context which may render it obsolete: treatment activities intervene in such threats. The best way to preserve an historic property is not to have to intervene but to maintain it in continued use for its original purpose in a way that sustains its physical integrity. Most of the subdivisions surveyed in New Castle County are so situated. As residential landscapes, most are protected by zoning which separates residential from non-residential uses and sets density standards through minimum lot size and set back

requirements. Although all of the subdivisions studied for this context were built before zoning was established in New Castle county in the 1950s, all of them were "grandfathered" into the existing zoning and their basic character is protected by law, with exceptions as noted below.

Most residential subdivisions in this historic context are also "protected" by the housing market itself, one in which housing values have continually appreciated over the last 20 years and in which the demand is particularly keen for lower cost single-family houses, which is the niche now filled by many of the single-family subdivisions built during the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, because the market for owner-occupied housing is so tight, one of the threats to the integrity of houses in subdivisions is inappropriate renovation as families find it less expensive to expand their present homes than to move to larger houses.

However, even within the protection provided by zoning and the strong housing market, there are some subdivisions which have lost integrity and are now experiencing a number of threats. These are primarily the older Streetcar Subdivisions built from 1880 to 1920 although some early Turnpike Suburbs have been undermined as well. The physical integrity of a subdivision lies both in the ground plan for the site and in the buildings, primarily houses and garages. The ground plan, consisting of streets, sidewalks, and other improvements is fairly impervious to change, unless the site is redeveloped in whole or in part. Much more vulnerable to change and loss of integrity are buildings and the uses to which they are put.

The subdivisions that have been most vulnerable to loss of integrity in their ground plans are those which were originally located adjacent to streetcar lines or roads that became major arteries with their frontage converted to commercial use and residential structures altered for commercial use or demolished and replaced by commercial buildings. Several streetcar suburbs were so effected. Subdivisions along Concord and Philadelphia Pikes in Brandywine Hundred have also been affected by commercial strip development as were those south of Wilmington along US Route 13 and State Route 9. Presently, road widening, to accommodate increasing volumes of traffic, is the principle threat to the ground plans of many subdivisions.

Changes to buildings in a subdivision-through modifications, demolition, and new construction-have been the most common cause of loss of integrity. Many pre-automobile subdivisions, for example have been modified through the addition of garages and street widening. As mentioned, many houses have been continually altered over time. Several of the older subdivisions, built as working class neighborhoods near Wilmington, not included in the appreciating housing market, have experienced deterioration and decline similar to central city housing although maintaining their integrity. At the same time, this housing continues to provide affordable shelter in a very tight housing market. In this situation, historic preservation and housing preservation need to be joined in a single activity. Such structures could be rehabilitated through the federal Community Development Block Grant program administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development.

The most significant barrier, however, to the development of effective treatment strategies for

historic subdivisions is a lack of public awareness that they are now considered historic landscapes. Conversely, the most effective way to maintain the integrity of Wilmington's historic subdivisions is to create a public awareness and appreciation of what makes them significant historically. The major treatment strategy proposed here is public education.

The treatment goals for suburbs have five parts:

1. To develop a public education program on New Castle County's historic suburbs derived from the historic context and the results of the identification and evaluation activities.
2. To provide protection through the "Community Character" section of the New Castle County Comprehensive Land Use Plan and its zoning requirements for residential subdivisions.
3. To implement four or five "cooperative subdivision historic districts" as part of the County Historic Preservation Plan.
4. To translate the "Suburban Houses" Multiple Resources Nomination (proposed earlier) into a suburban historic houses portfolio and tour to complement the more traditional historic house tours.
5. To develop a program linking historic preservation with housing preservation and work with housing rehabilitation interests and programs to rehabilitate historically significant, but deteriorated, subdivisions.

**1. Public Education Program.** An intensive and diverse public education program is the central treatment strategy proposed here to protect New Castle County subdivisions that are eligible for the National Register. The public education program would consist of a series of six publications the first which would be a brief overview of New Castle County suburbs and their historic significance. It would be distributed as a part of the identification and evaluation activities both to explain those activities as well as to broaden the understanding of suburbs as an historic resource. (It could be made into a videotape, released for newspaper stories, and scripted for radio spots.) As identification and evaluation activities were completed for each of the three major types of suburbs-Streetcar, Turnpike, and Automobile-a publication would be written describing each property type. The fifth publication would describe the range of suburban houses found in New Castle County. The sixth publication would summarize the findings of the identification and evaluation activities and discuss the 1960s suburbs as the next phase in the project.

**2. Protect Subdivisions through the County Comprehensive Landuse Plan.** As noted, in terms of their general character, most subdivisions are already basically protected under the New Castle County comprehensive plan. Although there has not been a great emphasis on historic preservation in the plan, there has been an emphasis on "community character" which has to do with the physical qualities of the county and in fact strives to protect the suburban character of the county. That such character can now be considered to have historic value should be incorporated into the community



character section of the comprehensive plan. This could be accomplished by adding a section to the community character section of the plan describing the historic significance of those suburbs found eligible for the National Register. In addition, the present zoning restrictions for each of the eligible subdivisions should be examined to be sure that it is receiving the maximum protection, especially for those subdivisions abutting major arteries and commercial zones. In this, historic preservation goals can be used to reenforce planning goals such as maintaining community integrity.

**3. Designate Five "Cooperative" Historic Districts.** As part of the public education strategy and lacking a stronger historic district ordinance, the County Historic Preservation Commission might consider establishing what are called here "cooperative" historic districts which function as demonstration districts which are used to demonstrate the key characteristics of suburban development. The districts should be chosen to represent each of the major types of subdivisions in the county.

**4. Develop a "Suburban Houses" Portfolio and Tour.** Whereas the subdivision is the basic suburban historic property, it was however, the landscape context for showcasing the suburban house which was designed to accommodate the then current values of family living and affordability. The house on an individual lot has been the icon of the suburban landscape. To illustrate the range of cultural values expressed through suburban architecture and to heighten the appreciation of the suburban landscape as being of historic significance, a portfolio of the best representatives of suburban housing types should be written, with drawings and photographs, including a diversity from bungalows to manors. This could serve as the basis to add a 20th century suburban dimension to historic house tours in the county.

**5. Yoking Historic Preservation and Housing Preservation.** With a shortage of affordable housing one of the most serious problems facing New Castle County, it is imperative to protect as much of the existing housing stock as possible, especially that which can provide opportunities for affordable housing both through home ownership and rental. In the identification and evaluation phase, subdivisions should be noted which retain their integrity but are deteriorated and which might be candidates for rehabilitation under the Federal Community Development Block Grant Program administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development. The State Historic Preservation Officer and the New Castle County Historic Preservation Planner should work actively with the County Department of Housing and Community Development, which administers the Federal Community Development Block Grant Funds to target these areas.

The overall strategy for preserving historic subdivisions, then, is one of integrating treatment activities with other land use and housing activities of the New Castle County government coupled with an extensive and well designed public education program. The priorities among these five activities are 1) designing and implementing a public education program, 2) yoking historic preservation and housing preservation, 3) protecting subdivisions through the New Castle County Comprehensive Landuse Plan,

4) designating five "cooperative" subdivision historic districts, and 5) developing a "suburban houses" portfolio and tour.